

Dublin City Marathon 2016 – Race Report



Being from the capital city myself and having “made my (marathon) bones” here last year, this event holds some personal meaning for me. My dad did it back in 1983, fuelling on “a few hard boiled sucky sweets n’ a bottle of water, none of this gel nonsense” and with the route passing through a few of my old stomping grounds it’s one that will always stand out for me. It’s an “away day” for me now but travelling with the ATC crew, led by Your Pace or Mine (YPOM) Commander in Chief Seamus Rowan the logistics of racing in the Big Schmoke were never going to be an issue. Many of us in ATC will be familiar with Seamus' organisation skills and all round selflessness and he once again did not disappoint for DCM. All logistical detail from this point on is the work of Mr Rowan, for which I and I’m sure every recipient of his hosting talents are extremely grateful.

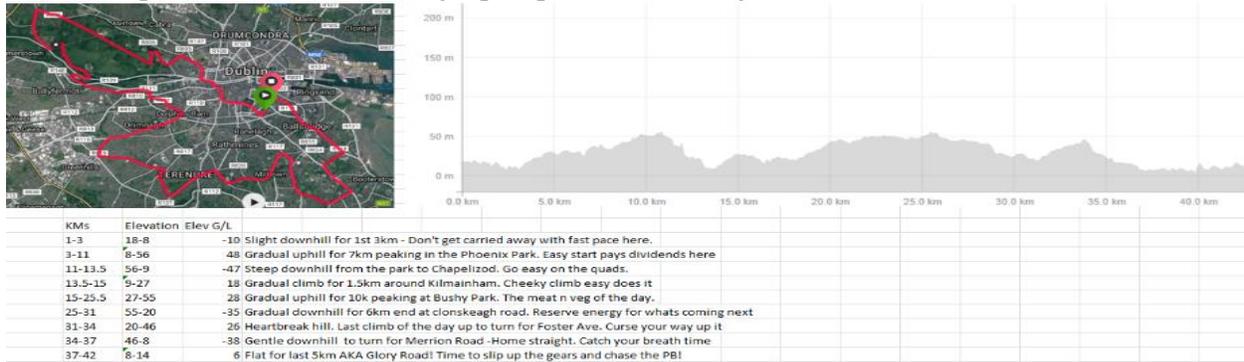
Race day began with a 6am meeting at Topaz in Athy. Travelling up once again with Seamus, Joe & Sinead we led the Athy car convoy close behind. The banter about last year’s event, this year’s race expectations and backwards glances to ensure the other cars were still in tow made the trip up a short and enjoyable one.

We arrived at “Base Camp”, located on Northumberland Street, only minutes away from the start & finish lines, pretty much on (Seamus’) schedule, maybe 90mins before the start! The heating was on and the host quickly had us sipping from a selection of freshly brewed coffees and enjoying our breakfasts in plush comforts reserved for a tiny fraction of the 19,500 or so registered participants. The pre-race group gathering and light banter really eases the nerves and deflates tension, particularly for Marathon debutants of which we had a few. The weather outside was perfect for running too with an overcast day, no rain and mild temperatures expected. We could not have asked for a better start to the day.

The organisers were on point this year when it came to stewarding the starting pens. Too good in fact, as I’d hoped to join the sub 4 hour hopefuls in the same pen but could only gain entry to the quicker pen as I was using a friend’s ticket on the day (thanks again to Mick O’Connor for that generosity). So as I lined up with the semi pro athletes (ATC represented here by the likes of Team Speed aka John & Ethna Sourke, Peadar “The Bullet” Owens, Jeff “Big Strides” Butler & Paul “Manflu” McDonald I felt more than a little out of place. After some light warm ups, a few regrets for not taking one last portaloo pitstop the gun went off and we were away. All runners wearing their best gear and smiles. Apart from Pink Paul who inexplicably went with an all-black number for the day out in Dublin!!!



The route itself is an honest course as the pro's would say. Basically, tarmac roads, some hills with testing decline/inclines of varying degrees of difficulty. Not the hardest, not the easiest.



Meandering through the city centre, out through the Phoenix Park and Chapelizod for the 1st 10 miles/16k. There is actually more elevation in this section than in any other part of the race but it's usually where most people make their biggest marathon mistake and take off too fast. I let the herd swish past me and settled into a steady but comfortable pace. I'd decided to change tactics a little for this race and not go on my usual (beloved) heart rate monitoring. The reason being I'd been experiencing some fatigue since doing the Barcelona event 4 weeks previously and while my head and body felt good, my heart rate was acting up (mostly up) at even the slightest hint of exertion. So I went with the conversation pace plan, not that anyone around me was talking. These sub 3:00 - 3:30 lads (you know the one's that wear real running vests) are dead serious at the start!

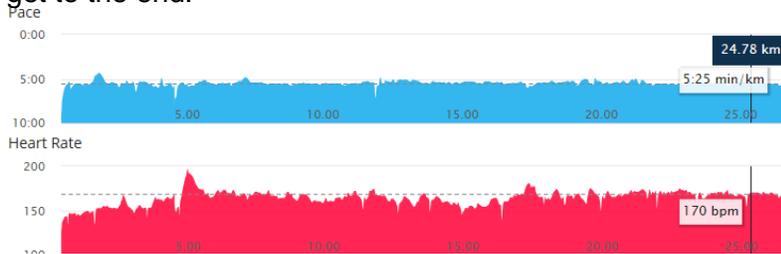
By the 10 mile/16k mark I'd already been passed by hundreds (if not thousands) of participants including a lad in full Franciscan Monk robes, a surfer dude in sandals, a bloke carrying a 6ft high Eiffel Tower, a guy in his late 50's in thick cord trousers and a buttoned up check denim shirt, the devil - complete with trident and a moxy load of club groups being led by drill sergeant type pacers. I'd found a reasonably comfortable pace though at about 5:30 mins per kilometre and was happy to stick with that for the 1st half and see how it goes. I'd been sipping and refilling my trusty hand held bottle of USN during the first half of the race and planned to switch to my prepared race belt bottles containing watered down high five gels for the 2nd half of the race. Grabbing water along the way as required. Keep it simple lad, keep it simple.

Overall, I found the course route to be nice. I was really taken aback by the amount of supporters on the streets. There seemed to be a lot more people out this year. At times it was like a carnival, with entertainment points along the route with DJ's, MC's and families everywhere. A really supportive and encouraging atmosphere the whole way. It always makes you feel like you're doing something special and I love to acknowledge it and high five the kids along the way. I think it makes their day when runners do that, it certainly does make mine.

After leaving the scenic calming green tones of the Phoenix Park the route takes you on a tour of "Old Dublin". Tipping away through Kilmainham, Dolphin's Barn, Drimnagh and Terenure, on up to Milltown to the 20 mile/32k marker. A less scenic route but one packed with crowds and marshals helping you every step of the way. The only real negative I'd have was I found it to be quite congested at times. Especially on turning corners in the city, the Phoenix Park and at the half way mark at Drimnagh. I understand why packs stick tight to the pacer balloons but moving through the field on a narrow road like a desert sandstorm is just not cool. Even the slightest

tipping of a heel or a bang from a passing elbow is enough to knock someone off their stride (which did happen to me and others).

Anyway, as we entered the 2nd half of the race I'd begun to feel the strain and a cheeky look at the heart rate monitor confirmed things. My HR was drifting up while trying to maintain the same pace so it was decision time. I had at this point figured if I could keep up this pace I'd come close to clocking a sub 4 hour finish (even with an expected slowdown up heartbreak hill later). A sub 4 hour was well beyond me last year, I failed miserably tbh. So now I either had to ease off on the pace and forget the sub 4 glory or grind it out and trust in the stubbornness to get to the end.



We all know that along with death and taxes there is one other great certainty in life, and that is you cannot fake fitness and will be found out at "mile 20" every time. Experienced marathon runners will also tell you that a marathon is a race of 2 halves, the first half is 20 miles long, and the second is the remaining 6.2 miles! After bombing spectacularly in 2015 struggling through the last 6.2 miles/10k with severe muscle & joint pain, running on empty and adamant that I'd never ever run a marathon again, 12 months later I find myself back, a little fitter and a little stronger in body and mind with a chance to redeem my self-pride. After refuelling my motivational tanks with the shouts of encouragement and cheers from Team Kavanagh at 22k and some high fives from the Murray clan (Dublin friends) at 26k I thought feck it, last big race of the year, go for it!



I stuck on the headphones, turned up the volume on the run playlist (Eminem, The Script & Public Enemy in case you're wondering) and went heading for Heartbreak Hill.

That section from Milltown up to the turn off at the top of Roebuck road is a b@stard. No other way to describe it. I'm usually pretty loose with my vocabulary anyway but I was joined by an orchestra of tenors using their last gasps of lung capacity to throw out expletives at what seems like a never ending hill. I don't care who you are, Peadar "Mo Farah" Owens or Eamonn "Homer Simpson" McEntee that section hurts. People walk, crawl and cry through that stretch of road and reaching the top at the turn on to Foster's Avenue isn't always the end of the pain.

From there though the route is more accommodating to burning calves and cement hard quads. It's still a long way home but running down the Stillorgan Road heading for town it feels like you are going in the right direction at least. It's from this point too that the bags and plates of sugar treats being handed out by spectators (all along the route) are greatly appreciated and gobbled up like it's your last meal. The body needs energy at this stage, jelly babies are the answer!

As the Marathon nuts turn on to the appropriately named Nutley lane with maybe 4k to go I took a quick look at my time, “not bad, keep this pace and it’s your race”, “how’s the heart rate? Yieks I shouldn’t have looked”, just keep this pace and it’s your race”.

Then, as the Garmin hits 41k through Ballsbridge, 41.5k up Northumberland road, you know you’ve done it. 1st, 2nd or 52nd marathon makes no difference, knowing you’re almost there, just about to finish a marathon is a feeling akin to very little else in life. You feel sore and drained of all energy but you also feel proud and emotional. Apparently I was spotted and shouted at by a few Athy supporters in the last kilometre but I heard none of it. I just wanted the finish line to appear. When it did, I gave my thanks to those who helped me (both along the route and in my head) and passed on through to collect the medal. All marathon medals are collectors’ items but this bad boy (with its commemorative theme) and my first sub 4 hour finish will take pride of place (behind the bar) for sure.

According to Seamus (Stato) I was one of 22 ATC members who completed DCM this year.

Upon arriving back at Base Camp, washed, fed and watered I (along with those returning)

tracked all of our athletes/friends home. Quite a number (and way too many for me to chance listing as I’d defo forget someone) but to one and all, well done guys & gals you did yourselves and your club proud.



As Dean Martin would say **“Memories are made of this”**

